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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001351

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2015

TAGS: ELAB PHUM PREL BM

SUBJECT: ILO REP DISAPPOINTED BY UNCHANGED BURMA POSTURE

REF: A. GENEVA 2936
B. RANGOON 1222

Classified By: Econoff TLManlowe for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) ILO Liaison Officer Richard Horsey returned to Rangoon on November 28 after a one month absence. Horsey told poloff that he met soon after returning with Minister of Labor U Thaung, who assured Horsey that his personal security would be safeguarded and stressed the GOB's commitment to investigating the recent death threats made against him. The Minister also expressed his availability to have a dialogue with the ILO on labor issues. However, the Minister did not offer any information on new GOB plans to address ILO concerns, including measures to guarantee the ILO Liaison Officer's full exercise of his functions, investigation and prosecution of forced labor cases and cessation of reprisals against Burmese citizens who make accusations of forced labor (ref A). Horsey expressed great pessimism about the chances that the regime will act on any ILO recommendations soon.

¶2. (C) Horsey noted that the Minister seemed relaxed and confident in their meeting. U Thaung did not mention the reasons why the GOB had reversed its decision to withdraw from the ILO, as the Minister had told Horsey and an ILO envoy in October (ref B). Horsey concluded that the Minister had not suffered any adverse political damage from the flip-flop. He also noted that, in response to the highly critical ILO Governing Board meeting in Geneva in November, the GOB had nothing to say of substance.

¶3. (C) Comment: If the threat to withdraw was a bluff to gain ILO concessions, the GOB now realizes it failed. The ILO Governing Board Chairman specifically rejected GOB attempts to pressure and intimidate the ILO. But the situation has now returned to "status quo ante", with the regime offering verbal assurances of compliance while ignoring requests and delaying action. As we approach the next ILO Governing Board meeting in March 2006 and the June 2006 ILC meeting, we will monitor whether the GOB's professed interest in cooperating on forced labor issues is anything more than an empty promise. End comment.
VILLAROSA